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EDUCATION UNDER THE NEW DEAL

Free, universal public education, continually changing and expanding to meet new needs and situations is fundamental to a democracy. It is commonly assumed that this has been provided in the United States.

THE CRISIS IN EDUCATION

The depression has brought widespread deflation in education. This has now been documented by the National Education Association and the U. S. Office of Education.

We Cut Education. The U. S. Commissioner of Education reports: 2,280,000 children of school age are not in school; 2,000 rural schools in 24 states failed to open in the fall of 1933; 16 colleges and 1500 commercial schools have closed; school terms in nearly every large city are from 1 to 2 months shorter than they were 70 to 100 years ago; 900,000 school children in 18,000 rural schools are attending school for less than six months in 1934. Public school statistics show that the cost of education per child has gone down from $90.22 in 1930 to $66.53 in 1934. The chairman of the Joint Commission on the Emergency in Education of the N. E. A. reports that in November, 1932, 40 schools had been closed; that after the bank crisis in 1933, 5,825 had been closed, and he estimated (in November) that by April, 1934, 20,300 schools enrolling over a million children would be closed. Also college budgets have been cut deeply and at the same time tuition and student fees are being sharply increased.

How We Do It. (1) By *salary cuts:* The N. E. A. says that 1 out of 4 of our teachers is receiving annual wages below the minimum for factory workers under the blanket code. Salary reductions are general. The U. S. Office of Education gives these as typical—Colorado 5% to 20%; Kansas perhaps 30%; Nebraska 40%; Tennessee 25%. In many cases there is more loss through the discounting of warrants (see below). Moreover, 14 states reported to the N. E. A. non-payment of teachers' salaries running from $2400 in Clayton, N. M., to $22,000,000 in Chicago. (2) By *eliminating teachers and increasing teacher load:* While the school enrollment from 1930 to 1934 increased about 675,000 pupils, the number of teachers decreased 40,000. In five states the average is 40 pupils per teacher. (3) By *reducing school terms:* The U. S. Office of Education says that 1 of every 4 cities has shortened its school term; that 715 rural schools are expected to run less than three months this year. It gives as examples Michigan, where 90% of the schools will shorten terms; Nebraska, where 15% of the schools will cut at least 1 month; and Missouri with 1600 rural schools facing early closing. (4) By *reducing free text book supplies:* Old books are being worn out and not replaced. Sales of text books have dropped over 30% since 1930. (5) By *reducing operating and maintenance expenses:* The building of new schools has almost stopped. The N. E. A. thinks that probably not more than 1 city in 20 had any classrooms under construction last year.

"Fads and Frills." The first departments to be cut or closed are the extras. Advocates of curtailment call them "fads and frills." Many of these have proved their worth through a quarter of a century or more. The U. S. Office of Education enumerates what has happened since 1930 in about 700 typical cities: 67 reduced art instruction, 36 eliminated it; 110 reduced the music program, 29 eliminated it; 81 reduced the physical education work, 28 eliminated it; 65 reduced home economics work, 19 eliminated it; 58 reduced industrial art instruction, 24 eliminated it; 89 reduced health service, 22 eliminated it.

Does this mean the end of the American dream of free and unlimited education for all who want it?

RETRENCHMENT—A CLASS ISSUE?

School deflation is part of the general retrenchment. Is it anything more than that?

Have We Class Education? The U. S. Bureau of Education reported in 1930 that 10%—1 out of 10—of the children in school would not reach 6th grade; 14.2%—1 out of 7—would not reach the 7th grade; 25.2%—1 out of 4—would not reach the 8th grade. A survey of any community shows that it is the children of workers and farmers who drop out in the largest numbers. Moreover, schools in rural districts, industrial areas and among Negroes (see below) tend to have poorer equipment and less well-trained teachers. Several years ago Prof. Counts, of Columbia made a study which showed that our public high schools are maintained almost entirely for the children of managers, professional people, proprietors, business men and clerks. In the Soviet Union the percentage of workers and workers' children in the higher general educational and higher technical educational institutions rose from 25% in 1928 to 58% at the end of the Five-Year Plan, in 1933.

Are Schools Free? As a rule school children are taught to obey orders without question and they have little to say about running the school. Professor Dewey found the Russian school children much more democratically organized than ours. Many teachers complain that the school system dictates what they shall teach and how. Teachers in Colorado, Washington, South Dakota and some other states must take loyalty oaths. Textbook writers are not free. Professor Counts says that a history textbook must not offend the D. A. R., the K. of C., the American Legion, etc. The government organizes R. O. T. C. units in high schools and colleges; the Vinson bill just passed by the Senate provides for 85 additional junior high school and 22 additional senior college units.

Banker Control. Big financial and business interests are influential in the making of school programs and policies. They have been represented heavily on the recent citizens' committees that have concerned themselves with retrenchment. Graham Taylor reports that in Chicago, of 29 members of the Citizens' Committee that dictated retrenchment 14 live along the Lake Shore Drive in a strip two blocks wide and less than a mile long, 5 are directors of one or another of the largest banks, others are affiliated with big business enterprises. Only 2 or 3 of the 20 who have children have sent them to the public elementary schools of Chicago. He says that they laid themselves "under the suspicion of a class conscious motive to reduce the taxes of those most heavily assessed." The four-year financial agreement between New York City officials and the bankers last September registered in the school world in November. Teachers would have had their first payless pay day but for the fact that the Teachers' Pension Board consented to reinvest $4,500,000 in New York City bonds. This amount was used to complete the full payroll.

Educators Fall in Line. Some of the educators who helped to build up our schools are now seeking to limit them. In 1932 Dr. William J. Cooper, then U. S. Commissioner of Education, surveyed the school systems of Europe and on his return pointed out "lessons" that we could learn from Germany, England, and Italy, notably limiting secondary education by charging tuition. In the report of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (financed by wealthy interests) for the same year, President Emeritus H. S. Pritchett endorsed school retrenchment by means of fewer and simpler courses of study; tuition fees for secondary schools with "the standard of admission . . . such as to exclude the manifestly unfit," and tuitions in tax-supported universities.

Chamber of Commerce Attack. The above attacks were on the high schools. Drastic retrenchment for the public schools was proposed in a 20-point program circulated by the U. S. Chamber of Commerce by means of a questionnaire to its local member Chambers. Among the proposals are these: shorten the school day one hour; reduce high school curriculum from 4 to 3 years and elementary school from 8 to 7 years; transfer one-third the cost of all instruction above high school level from taxpayers to pupil; impose a fee on high school students; discontinue kindergartens and evening schools; shorten school year not to exceed 12%; reduce teachers' salaries not to exceed 10%; increase teaching hours and size of classes; simplify curriculum and overhead administration and centralize responsibility; postpone new capital outlay for building and replacements; economize on operation of plants and purchase of supplies.

Is there any connection between this program and the retrenchment actually carried out all across the country? Does it mean robots and masters instead of democracy?

Counter Attack. There are many small beginnings of organized protest by pupils, teachers and parents. The most spectacular example was in Chicago last year. Thousands of high school students struck in behalf of the teachers. Then the teachers themselves under the pressure of pay checks long in arrears, evictions, tax sales, and elapsed insurance policies staged demonstrations and "raids" on the banks. These on the eve of the World's Fair are credited with the pay day that followed. At Brighton Beach and in the Bronx, New York, protesting delegations of parent-teacher groups

are credited respectively with a new wing in an overcrowded school and installation of electric lights. Left wing groups urge parent-teacher-student action: "When teachers show parents two children forced into one seat, bad lighting and stuffy rooms and filthy toilets, without soap or towels, parents will be stirred to action." But school authorities meet teacher activity by dismissal or transfer and police terror is the answer to strikes and demonstrations. The current anti-war strikes and demonstrations are part of this story.

IS RETRENCHMENT NECESSARY?

What the Schools Cost. In 1926 we spent $2,026 millions on education (including current expenses, capital outlays and interest; not including payment for bonds, short term loans, and sinking funds). The appropriations climbed each year to 1930 when they were $2,317 millions. The 1931 figure was the same. Then they declined to $1,922 million in 1933 and to $1,753 million in 1934.

Indebtedness. The U. S. Office of Education says that 259 school districts in 29 states have had to default on their indebtedness; that some cities, compelled to refinance, have had to pay 6% interest instead of 4% as formerly; that where no cash was available school districts have paid their teachers with interest-bearing warrants and that total unpaid warrants amount to $40,000,000; that from school funds, $150,000,000 will have to be paid in 1933-34 to adults for interest on warrants and bonds—not a dollar of that sum can go to the teaching of children.

Declining Funds. It lays the declining funds to the burden that the depression has laid upon real estate: "Schools are the most completely local of American public services. To support them the most completely local source of income—real estate (farms, homes, stores, factories, etc.), has been taxed." Fixed payments due on mortgages mean that a citizen must often decide whether to save his farm or home or his school. School funds fail because of tax delinquency; lower assessed valuation; declining tax rates on real estate; bank failures; decreased state aid for schools. Also the difference in wealth in the various states means that unequal burdens rest on the poorer ones.

N. E. A. Asks Millions. A year ago the Joint Committee on the Emergency in Education of the N. E. A. launched an attack on the curtailment of education. It has now put forward a federal legislative program calling for: a $50,000,000 appropriation to keep the grade and high schools open the rest of the year and as nearly normal as possible; a $100,000,000 appropriation for 1934-35; release of local funds through federal refinancing or loans; 10% of new appropriations for public work allocated for building schools and colleges; $30,000,000 for scholarship aid.

Can these big sums be found under a failing profit system? Is not a contracting culture the inevitable corollary of a declining economy? Yet it can appropriate about a billion dollars for military and naval purposes. Is it now compelled by its own nature to give us more of the means of death than the means of life?

SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES

Hungry School Children. Teachers in industrial communities have long had to reckon with under-nourished children in their classrooms. The situation has grown progressively worse during the depression. Sometimes communities have learned of it through testimony of teachers, as in the case of the public hearings held in Chicago in 1932 by the Chicago Workers' Committee on Unemployment. Now it is a matter of government record. Federal Relief Administrator Hopkins said in October that there were 6,000,000 children in the United States who had food because their parents went to the relief stations for it. Experts, he said, tell what diet is required and that information is passed on to the relief authorities, but, "do these 6,000,000 children get these diets? They do not"; instead all over the country their families are on "a pauper level of 50 or 60 cents a day."

Negro Children Retarded. The Federal Office of Education reports that Negro children are seriously retarded, about two-thirds of them being over-age for their grades. It lays this to the shortness of the school term, the poorly prepared and overburdened teachers and lack of equipment. This is part of the findings of a recent survey of the effect of the depression on rural elementary education of Negro children. Half of these were found living two to three miles from a schoolhouse; bus service was provided for only 1%; as a result more than a million of grade school age were not attending school. Nearly 40% of the schools were using benches with no desks. A few had no blackboards. Even in "normal" times Negro children are greatly discriminated against. In the south schools are "Jim Crow" and often appropriations for the education of Negro children is but a fraction of that for the white children's schools.

Instead of School. Child labor deprives multitudes of children of education even in prosperity years. The 1930 census showed 2,145,958 working children between the ages of 10 and 17; 667,118 between 10 and 15 years. The Children's Bureau says that

the number leaving school to go to work has been greatly reduced by the depression and that the codes will "make permanent" the gain. But Grace Hutchins reports in her study, "Youth and Industry," that there are today 5,000,000 working boys and girls between 10 and 19 years in the United States. There must be added to these school-less youth several hundred thousand wandering children between 12 and 20 years old; it is generally believed that the number has grown greatly since the Children's Bureau gave out its estimate of 200,000 to 300,000 in 1932.

Concerning Illiteracy. In as far as school retrenchment has cut out night schools, classes for the foreign born, etc., it has retarded the "drive"—never very aggressive—on illiteracy. As President Hoover's National Advisory Committee on Illiteracy ended its work (for lack of funds) at the end of 1933, it reported what it called progress; the 5,000,000 illiterates over 20 years of age, which surveys prior to 1930 had reported, had been cut to an estimated 4,283,753. (cf. the Soviet Union, where illiteracy has been reduced from 70% in 1913 to less than 10% in 1933.)

What does the cutting out of "frills" mean to the illiterate foreign or native born adult who wants to learn to read and write?

An Unwanted Generation. Everyone knows, at first-hand or second-hand, that the youth finishing or dropping out of school cannot find jobs. At the 1933 Commencement season Beulah Amidon of the *Survey* set out to document the situation. She asked the schools what had happened to their graduates of 1930, 1931 and 1932. These reports are typical of many: the director of the Yale Bureau of Appointments said that placements for 1932 were two-thirds of those for 1931; Reed College, Portland, Ore., reported that unemployment among graduates a year after they left school had increased from 6% in 1930 to 25.6% for 1932. The University of Chicago Campus Employment Bureau, in which about 75% of the graduates register for jobs, reported that about 75% were placed in 1930, 60% to 70% in 1931, and less than 50% in 1932.

What Kind of Jobs? Large numbers of the students went back to school because there were no jobs. One of these testified, "I have reached the saturation point . . . but I can't get a job . . . it's a waste of their money (the parents) and my time." Another said, "A lot of us are muddling around with graduate studies because we don't know what else to do." Jobs reported by and for college graduates include many dead-end occupations: elevator operators, file clerks, filling station attendants, canvassers, taxi drivers, even street sellers. A personnel man said, "We cut overhead by letting out employees drawing $18 to $25 a week and taking on inexperienced college graduates at $8 to $12." Part of the same picture is the testimony of persons dealing with young college graduates: "They have no notion what they want to do." "They have no sense of direction."

A Double Tragedy. Many of the unwanted are teachers let out, or college and normal school graduates trained to teach, but finding no place in the system—at the same time that children are deprived of all schooling, or have their education curtailed at important points; and teachers who are kept on carry the added load of pupils, with reduced salaries and equipment. The U. S. Office of Education says there are about 200,000 certificated teachers who are unemployed. Teachers are on relief rolls all over the country. Superintendent Bogan of Chicago said in a radio address last May, "Nearly a year ago a well known charitable organization assisted 500 of the neediest teachers—and the situation is infinitely worse now." The Welfare Council of New York reports that out of 173 applicants for jobs registered at the Negro Y. W. C. A. during December, 1933, 65 were teachers, and for the first two months of 1934 about half the applicants were teachers.

The New Deal's Only Answer. In August, 1933, the FERA authorized local relief commissions and rural communities to use federal funds to pay work relief wages to needy unemployed teachers, or others competent to teach in the grade schools. The CWA included in its projects much school building and equipment repair. The CWS made many jobs for white-collar workers who could show "need." Last winter the U. S. Commissioner of Education reported that 42 state plans had been filed and that a dozen of them were beginning to function. Projects included classes for adult illiterates, general culture courses, plans for rehabilitation, for keeping rural and nursery schools open, etc. Relief funds were also appropriated to colleges and professional schools for work relief for students.

What becomes of a society that cannot use to the full the creative capacities of its youth?

Sources. "The Deepening Crisis in Education," U. S. Office of Education; "Schools and the Crisis," by Rex David, International Pamphlets No. 39; N. E. A. Research Bulletin, November, 1933; items and articles in the *Survey*, especially "After College—What?", by Beulah Amidon, June, 1933, and "Our Public Schools in Progress and Re-action," by Graham Taylor, February, 1934; Soviet Union official survey of fulfillment of the First Five-Year Plan; *New York Times.*

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